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## AGRICULTURE IN THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

Vishwambhar Dayal Tripathi

When agriculture was first introduced in the Andaman Islands the British government of India sent a number of reformed convicts to be rehabilitated as field workers in these islands. These agricultural convicts were later permitted to bring their wives and families from India. With the efforts of these people, agriculture was expanded, and the first signs of a stable economy appeared in the islands. The islands are now nearly self-sufficient in food production.

The total land area of the Andaman Islands is 2,508 square miles, only three fourths of which is arable. The arable land is found in the Thugapur, Betapur, Ramaghat, Bajalunta, Bomayaluttar, and Boraheem valleys of the Middle Andamans. The Nicobar Islands are arable in the same proportion, but agriculture is still undeveloped there.

The principal crops in these valleys of the Middle Andamans include paddy rice, pulse plants, and oil seeds. The yield of these crops can be increased through the use of fertilizers and irrigation. Prospective Indian settlers should be warned that farming is possible only on a small scale and that they should be prepared for hard work. The soil in the Andamans is not suitable for wheat, millet, etc.

Andaman fruits include bananas, papayas, coconuts, mangoes, and oranges. Potatoes and all types of vegetables are also cultivated. Some potatoes are imported from Calcutta; however, half of them rot en route, thus making them very expensive.

The soil of the islands is quite suitable for growing coconuts, the output of which can be increased with some effort. Three hundred and fifty acres are devoted to coconuts in the South Adamans. Several types of industries

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can be developed from the cultivation of coconuts. The local soap industry would be aided if the coconut-oil industry of the Andamans is developed. There was, at one time, a profitable, small-scale coconut-oil plant at Cellular Jail.

The Andaman soil is suited to the cultivation of sugar cane. At present, the crop is grown in small plots by individual farmers. As a result, only "gur" or crude sugar has been produced in the islands. Profits in sugar cane can be obtained only by the introduction of large-scale cultivation and the establishment of a sugar mill in the islands.

Some rubber is also grown in the area, but the industry is neglected.

The Andaman soil is not so good for tea, but it is suitable for the cultivation of coffee. Not much coffee is grown at present, but the area can be increased by clearing forest lands for coffee cultivation. Tea raising has been tried, but it was not particularly successful.

Jute raising has been attempted from time to time, but it also has been unsuccessful. The Indian Jute Research Laboratory maintains that the soil of the Andamans is adapted to jute production. Some hot spices, betel nuts, etc., also can be cultivated because of the favorable climatic and soil conditions.

The Indian government should conduct a survey and plan for the maximum benefits to be derived from the cultivation of these various crops.

Livestock is another problem in the Andamans. There were no cattle until a few were introduced into the islands by the earliest settlers. The farmers generally use buffaloes in the fields. There are also some bullocks. Cows imported from India have arrived in poor condition, and the milk production has been low, principally because of the unavailability of fodder. The people should be urged to grow better fodder crops.

On 25 March 1953, Dr Kailas Nath Katju, Indian Home Minister, described to the members of the House of the People the extent of government aid to the islands. He stated that, for purposes of agricultural development in the Andamans, the Indian government granted 79,000 rupees during 1952 - 1953 as compared with only 17,000 rupees during 1947 - 1948.

The minister added that the Andamanese farmer has been receiving various type of agricultural extension services, such as provisions of good crop seeds, and instructions in new methods and in the use of new tools in the cultivation of pulse plants, coconuts, bananas, cotton, peanuts, etc. As a result, he declared, rice is now harvested twice a year and a new variety of rice which matures in 70 days and can be planted four times a year has been found. Dr Katju also mentioned that similar government services have improved the various strains of coconuts, guavas, oranges, mangoes, etc. He particularly emphasized that after 2 years of research, government agricultural scientists were able further to improve and to increase the yield of sugar cane Variety No 419. The government is also teaching farmers to extract fruit juices and methods of raising chutney and spices, he concluded.

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